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WHO ARE THE PART-TIME FACULTY?

BY JAMES MONKS

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A TYPICAL PART-TIMER.

The use of contingent faculty in higher education in the United States has grown tremendously over the past three decades. In 1975, only 30.2 percent of faculty were employed part time; by 2005, according to data compiled by the AAUP from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), part-time faculty represented approximately 48 percent of all faculty members in the United States.

This growth in the use of part-time faculty has occurred despite low pay, almost nonexistent benefits, inadequate working conditions, and little or no opportunity for career advancement. For example, my own analyses in a 2007 article published in the *Journal of Labor Research*, "The Relative Earnings of Contingent Faculty in Higher Education," showed that part-time non-tenure-track faculty earn between 22 and 40 percent less than tenure-track assistant professors on an hourly basis. Who are these exploited workers, and why do they seem so willing to work under such terms and conditions?

Over the past few years, the AAUP has attempted to address the plight of part- and full-time non-tenure-track faculty, especially through the work of the Committee on Contingent Faculty and the Profession. The AAUP's 2003 policy statement *Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession* recommends increasing the proportion of faculty appointments that are on the tenure track and improving job security for contingent faculty. Additionally, in 2006 the AAUP adopted into its long-standing *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure* a new regulation that outlines policies and procedures for the treatment of contingent faculty. This regulation was followed by the publication of the AAUP's *Contingent Faculty Index*, which tabulates the use of contingent and tenure-track appointments at different institutions.

Despite the widespread perception that part-time faculty are exploited, underpaid, and afforded miserable working terms and

conditions, efforts to organize and unionize contingent faculty have had only limited success. According to the 2004 *National Study of Postsecondary Faculty*, 17 percent of part-time faculty report being a member of a "union or other bargaining association that is legally recognized to represent the faculty" at their institution, compared with more than 24 percent of full-time faculty. Given the low pay and poor working conditions thought to be prevalent in the contingent academic labor market, how is it that so many individuals are willing to work under such conditions, and why do they seem resistant to organizing to improve their lot?

Who Are the Part-Timers?

The 2004 *National Study of Postsecondary Faculty*, sponsored by the Department of Education and its National Center for Education Statistics, contains responses from 26,108 instructional faculty and staff members representing approximately 1.2 million university employees throughout the United States at public and private nonprofit higher education institutions offering an associate's degree or higher. My analysis in this article includes all of the respondents and uses faculty sampling weights to account for each respondent's probability of selection into the final sample.

Approximately 44 percent of respondents reported that their institution considered them to be employed part time in fall 2003. Table 1 presents summary measures separately for full- and part-time faculty. Nearly 60 percent of full-time faculty are male, while only half of part-time faculty are male. Similarly, full-time workers are more likely than part-time workers to be non-Hispanic white (81 percent compared with 77 percent) and to have dependent children (51 percent compared with 47 percent).

The most striking difference between full- and part-time workers is in the percentage who hold a doctorate or first professional degree such as an MD or JD. Two-thirds of full-time faculty hold a doctorate or first professional degree, while only 27 percent of

Table 1
Characteristics of Full- and Part-Time Faculty

	Full time (56% of total sample)	Part time (44% of total sample)
Male	59%	50%
Average age	48	48
Single, never married	12%	13%
White, non-Hispanic	81%	77%
Holds a PhD or first professional degree	67%	27%
Has dependent children	51%	47%
In first postsecondary job	46%	48%
Average basic institutional income	\$65,407	\$11,160
Average total individual income	\$78,553	\$51,628
Average total household income	\$113,831	\$91,798
Percent with a full-time "other" job	2%	46%
Number of other jobs involving instruction:		
Zero	97%	79%
One	3%	17%
Two or more	0%	4%
Percent whose first job was part time	26%	77%
Fields of teaching:		
Visual and performing arts	6%	9%
Business, management, or marketing	6%	8%
Computer and information systems	3%	5%
Education	8%	12%
English language and literature	6%	8%
Health professions and clinical sciences	13%	11%
Mathematics and statistics	5%	6%
Social sciences (except psychology) and history	9%	7%
All other fields	44%	35%

Note: Full sample includes 1,211,849 faculty members, 681,826 of whom are full time and 530,023 of whom are part time.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (2004)*.

part-time faculty hold such a degree. Not surprisingly, there are substantial differences in compensation between full- and part-time faculty. Specifically, the average "basic salary" from one's institution for full-time faculty is \$65,407, compared with only \$11,160 for part-time faculty. Similarly, full-time faculty report an average total individual income of \$78,553, while part-time faculty have an average total individual income of \$51,628. Finally, full-time faculty report an average household income of \$113,831, while part-time faculty

report an average household income of \$91,798.

Only about half of part-time faculty report having another job that is full time. While some part-time faculty teach at multiple institutions, this is not the norm: 79 percent of part-time faculty report that they do not have another teaching job, while 17 percent report teaching at one other institution, and 4 percent report teaching at two or more other jobs. There appears to be a good deal of diversity in the experiences of part-time faculty.

When part-time faculty were asked whether they would have preferred a

full-time position at their current institution, only 35 percent reported that they would have preferred such a position. It seems that a majority of part-time faculty are not seeking full-time employment at their institution.

Preference for Full Time

The 35 percent of part-time faculty who stated that they would prefer a full-time position can be further divided into three mutually exclusive groups. The three groups (in descending order of size) are (1) those without a PhD or first professional degree who are not retired (68 percent), (2) those with a PhD or first professional degree who are not retired (19 percent), and (3) retirees (14 percent). Table 2 presents summary measures separately for each group.

Members of the first group are less likely to be male (48 percent) than female and are slightly younger than those in the other groups, with an average age of forty-four years old. They work disproportionately in the visual or performing arts or in English language and literature. These individuals average \$10,464 in basic salary from their institution and have an average total individual income of \$37,453 and an average household income of \$70,931.

Three-quarters of these workers hold one or more other jobs, but most of those jobs do not involve teaching. A slight majority (54 percent) are in their first postsecondary job, but most have been in the job for five years or more. Perhaps the most discouraging news is that fully 85 percent started their postsecondary careers in part-time positions. This implies that 31 percent of these part-timers—those who do not have a PhD or first professional degree and would prefer to be full time—began in a part-time position and are still working part time for at least their second

Table 2*Characteristics of Part-Time Faculty Who Would Prefer Full-Time Position at Current Institution*

	No PhD or first professional degree and not retired	Holds PhD or first professional degree and not retired	Retired
Number (and percentage) of individuals in group	124,358 (68% of total)	34,415 (19% of total)	25,424 (14% of total)
Male	48%	55%	70%
Average age	44	48	56
Single, never married	17%	18%	9%
White, non-Hispanic	84%	82%	85%
Has dependent children	47%	49%	28%
Average basic institutional income	\$10,464	\$13,852	\$10,833
Average total individual income	\$37,453	\$47,616	\$52,926
Average total household income	\$70,931	\$88,230	\$94,038
Percent with a full-time "other" job	39%	36%	—
Number of other jobs:			
Zero	25%	35%	—
One	54%	48%	—
Two or more	21%	17%	—
Number of other jobs involving instruction:			
Zero	84%	79%	—
One	13%	17%	—
Two or more	3%	4%	—
This is first job	54%	33%	—
Year first job began (median)	1998	1993	—
First job is or was part time	85%	67%	—
Fields of teaching:			
Visual and performing arts	16%	5%	8%
Business, management, or marketing	8%	7%	12%
Computer and information systems	5%	2%	7%
Education	9%	8%	9%
English language and literature	14%	7%	9%
Health professions and clinical sciences	8%	6%	4%
Mathematics and statistics	5%	5%	8%
Social sciences (except psychology) and history	7%	13%	11%
All other fields	28%	47%	32%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (2004)*.

institution. It appears that their lack of a terminal degree may be limiting their career advancement.

The popular media often depict part-time faculty as PhD holders who long to obtain full-time tenure-track positions. The group that most closely matches this characterization is composed of the 34,415 nonretired part-time workers who hold a terminal degree and report a preference

for working full time. This group is 55 percent male, 82 percent non-Hispanic white, and 18 percent single and never married. Members of this group are forty-eight years old on average, and approximately half have dependent children. They report an average basic salary from their institution of \$13,852, with an average total individual income of \$47,616 and an average household

income of \$88,230. The distribution of employment across fields is similar to full-time faculty, with the exception that members of this group are less likely than others to work in the health professions and clinical sciences.

Thirty-five percent report having no other jobs, while 48 percent report having one other job, and 17 percent report having two or more

Table 3
Characteristics of Part-Time Faculty Who Would Not Prefer Full-Time Position at Current Institution

	Other primary employment	No other primary employment and not retired	Retired
Number (and percentage) of individuals in group	247,876 (72% of total)	56,688 (16% of total)	41,262 (12% of total)
Male	58%	22%	54%
Average age	48	46	62
Single, never married	9%	10%	7%
White, non-Hispanic	87%	90%	93%
Holds a PhD or first professional degree	25%	28%	31%
Average basic institutional income	\$8,132	\$21,608	\$14,943
Average total individual income	\$64,024	\$37,236	\$52,538
Average total household income	\$104,985	\$96,276	\$93,588
Percent with full-time "other" job	71%	—	—
Number of other jobs involving instruction:			
Zero	89%	72%	—
One	10%	24%	—
Two or more	1%	4%	—
Fields of teaching:			
Visual and performing arts	7%	8%	5%
Business, management, or marketing	10%	3%	7%
Computer and information systems	5%	3%	5%
Education	13%	12%	19%
English language and literature	5%	11%	11%
Health professions and clinical sciences	12%	19%	10%
Mathematics and statistics	5%	8%	10%
Social sciences (except psychology) and history	5%	5%	7%
All other fields	37%	31%	27%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *National Study of Postsecondary Faculty* (2004).

other jobs. Once again, most of these other jobs do not involve instruction. Approximately one-third are in their first job, and two-thirds report beginning their faculty careers in part-time positions. It appears that many members of this group of part-time faculty hold multiple positions, although most of them do not involve teaching. It also appears that many of these individuals began in part-time positions and are having a hard time moving out of those positions.

As expected, the 14 percent of part-time faculty who wish to work full time and report being retired from another position tend to be

older, with an average age of fifty-six years old, and are more likely to be male (70 percent). Only 28 percent of those in this group hold a doctorate or first professional degree. Their average basic salary from their institution is \$10,833, with an average total individual income of \$52,926 and an average household income of \$94,038. Compared with full-time faculty, members of this group are disproportionately working in business, management, or marketing (12 percent) or computer and information systems (7 percent). The typical part-time faculty member in this category appears to be a male, retired from a successful career, who

now teaches business or computer science courses.

No, Thanks

The 65 percent of part-time faculty who report that they would not prefer a full-time position at their institution can also be divided into three mutually exclusive groups: (1) those whose position at the college or university where they teach is not their primary position (72 percent), (2) those for whom the part-time faculty position is their primary position and who are not retired from another position (16 percent), and (3) those who are retired from another position (12 percent). Table

3 summarizes findings about these three groups.

The fact that 72 percent of the part-time faculty who would not prefer a full-time position report that their teaching position is not their primary job implies that almost half of all part-time faculty hold what they consider to be their primary job outside of their university appointment. Individuals in this largest group, which is 58 percent male and 87 percent non-Hispanic white, are forty-eight years old on average and are demographically comparable to most full-time faculty. Their average basic salary is \$8,132, which is approximately \$3,000 less than the average for all part-time faculty and likely reflects their lower teaching load. On the other hand, their average total individual income is \$64,024 and their average household income is \$104,985, both of which are approximately \$13,000 higher than the average for all part-time faculty.

This group of part-time faculty is disproportionately represented in the fields of business (10 percent) and education (13 percent). Almost 90 percent report that their other job does not involve teaching, and 71 percent report that their other job is full time. The typical member of this group appears to be a successful midcareer nonacademic, working in either business or education, who earns a more than adequate salary at a different, primary job and thus is willing to teach a course or two in addition to his or her main employment.

The next group of part-time faculty consists of those for whom the teaching position is the primary employment, who are not retired from another position, and who prefer working part to full time. This group is 78 percent female, and its members are forty-six years old, on average. Most (72 percent) of the

individuals in this group do not hold an additional job, and 53 percent report having dependent children. The average basic salary of a member of this group, \$21,608, is almost twice the overall average for part-time faculty, but the average total individual income of \$37,236 is approximately \$14,000 less than the average total individual income for all part-time faculty. The average household income of these faculty is \$96,276, slightly more than the average for all part-time faculty. Members of this group work disproportionately in the fields of health professions and clinical sciences (19 percent), education (12 percent), and English language and literature (11 percent). It appears this group is primarily composed of women who teach part time in historically female-dominated fields and do not hold terminal degrees or other jobs.

Last are the more than forty thousand part-time faculty who are retired from other positions and would not prefer to work full time. These individuals are older, with an average age of sixty-two years old. The average basic salary from the institution for a member of this group is higher than most part-time faculty, at \$14,943, while the average total individual income of \$52,538 and average household income of \$93,588 are quite similar to the incomes of most other part-time faculty.

No Typical Part-Timer

It appears from this analysis that there is no stereotypical part-time faculty member, and that part-time faculty have diverse motivations for pursuing teaching positions in higher education. While some part-time faculty appear to desire a full-time position at their current institution, a majority of part-time faculty express no desire for such a position. These part-time faculty are not currently

looking for career advancement in higher education and have other reasons for undertaking a teaching position at a college or university. The ready supply of individuals who prefer to hold part-time positions makes the labor market for part-time faculty who hope to move to full-time positions more difficult.

Two factors appear to limit the ability of part-time faculty to move to full-time positions. First, the availability and willingness of so many current and retired workers to hold part-time teaching positions at relatively modest salaries and without ambition for a full-time teaching appointment provide an ample supply of ready replacements for administrators willing to fill classrooms with part-time appointees. Second, most part-time faculty who desire a full-time position at their institution do not hold a doctorate or first professional degree. These terminal degrees are considered an absolute prerequisite for most permanent, full-time faculty positions. No amount of desire and hard work is likely to overcome this shortcoming on one's curriculum vitae.

Policies on contingent faculty need to take into account the variety of backgrounds and goals of individuals working in part-time positions. While it may be tempting to assume that most part-time faculty would prefer, and are in pursuit of, a full-time position, this view is erroneous and leaves most part-time faculty out of the picture. Institutional policies and contingent faculty advocates should provide support and resources designed to help part-time faculty obtain the terminal degrees needed for career advancement in addition to addressing other issues of interest to those part-time faculty who prefer to remain part time as well as those seeking full-time employment. ☞